STORIES OF SERENITY

Tales From Residents
10 Found Peace

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Stories of Serenity





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Introduction

This book is a compilation of the stories of previous residents at Serenity House. It is dedicated to you, the current or potential resident, as well as to those who have resided at Serenity House and have passed on, sober or not. These alumni share their stories in hopes that current and future residents will find solace in knowing that others with similar life experiences have spent time under the same roof and found joy, fellowship, and contentment there. Their stories do not entail every facet of their life or their time at Serenity House but rest assured that whatever you are thinking or feeling at this time, others have already experienced it within the walls that surround you. You may or may not meet some of us along your journey to recovery but know that the prayers we prayed at Serenity House, we pray now for you as well.

Many of us have lived with folk who have now passed on. Upon moving into Serenity House none of us knew what kind of friendships we would establish, and we equally did not know that we would attend some of their funerals. Even though some of these relationships end tragically, others will become sources of great joy as you trudge the road to happy destiny together. The Serenity House is not perfect, but we hope our stories prove that its structure worked for us, and we pray that you will take the chance of letting it work for you.

The Beginnings of Serenity House

Thank you to Bob Dumas for supplying this historical account of Serenity House.

The Serenity House came into being in 1994 through the dream of Ben Martin who with the help of Harold "Ben" Davis, and others. They contacted Auburn Foundry and were able to lease the 3 Acre property @ 2278 CR 50 for \$1.00 a year.

The House opened for residents in January of 1995, and I believe the first resident was Harold's son. Not sure about that. Somewhere in 1997 or 98 the property at 2438 including house and cow barn were purchased. I remember you could still see the ruts in the dirt floor the cows made when they came for milking. In June of 1999 I became a resident. I was in bad shape physically, mentally, and emotionally. (Weren't we all??). After only two months as resident Jerry and Ben asked me to manage the 3/4 house as it was called then @ 2438 CR 50. Sometime around March of 2000 we began the reconstruction of "the Barn". We held an old time barn raising, adding the kitchen, bathrooms, and mechanical rooms. Had the floor leveled and piped for steam heat cement poured etc. Added wood paneling and carpet to walls in dining room "The Barn" while it had been open for some time as a dining facility did not officially open for AA meetings until the first Saturday in February 2001. Huge meeting probably close to

100 in attendance. I won't get into the executive directors whether good or bad, but I do have definite opinions. LOL Jerry Jon Conn was her when I got here. Not sure of his hire date but would guess it was late 1994.

When Jerry was hired at the Step house in FW in 1972 at the age of 32 he felt he wouldn't get much respect, so he said he was 50 years old. No one knew his real age, not Ben. Sue Cherry, Norman Ayers, or me. I'll go into how we all learned his true age later. He asked me in 2002 if I thought it would be possible for him to get a Birthday card from President George Bush and his wife Laura on his 80th Birthday. So I wrote to our congressman with the request. He not only got a card from George and Laura Bush but from the congressman also. Later he got a Christmas card from the Bushes. We didn't learn his true age until after his funeral from his brother Mike Conn. I'm fact his tombstone at the catholic cemetery here in Auburn still reflects that he was 82 instead of 67. I should mention that Jerry was awarded The Sagamore of the Wabash by the governor. Not sure on that date but a copy of the award is in the Barn.

With Serenity House being a 501 © (3) not-for-profit they rely on grants and residents rent to operate. A big supporter of Serenity House is United Way and without their support Serenity House would struggle to keep their doors open. Each resident pays \$130.00 a week for rent and must be employed to live in the facilities. Another area of funding comes from grants from agencies such as Drug Free DeKalb

County and Drug Free Noble County. Serenity House has several fundraisers per year to help and raise funds as well one being the concert under the stars in Auburn where they will have a free concert for the community with silent auction, and donations being accepted.

Specializing in drug and alcohol rehabilitation the demographic that Serenity House is designed to help are people in the grips of addiction. They rely heavily on the support of the recovery community and they derive their principles from the 12-step recovery model. Each facility hosts several 12-step meetings per week opening the doors to the public and encouraging people within the recovery community to come share with the residents. Serenity House does a lot of volunteer work in the community as well partnering with United Way and engaging in events such as United Way's Day of Caring. Although the main purpose of Serenity House is to help people who are addicted, they also help the families, friends, and communities that surround them.

Spencer's Story

Serenity House Inc. consists of seven transitional living facilities: three in Auburn, three in Warsaw, and one in Albion, Indiana. Serenity House is run by an executive director, house managers, and a board of directors. My initial experience with Serenity was when I lived in one of these facilities in 2013 and went on to work for them from 2015-2017. Serenity House is a 501 © (3) not-for-profit agency that relies on grants as well as individual residents paying rent for funding. Among the seven facilities that Serenity house has there are two men's houses and one women's house in Auburn, two men's houses and one women's house in Warsaw, and one men's house in Albion; it is possible that they will procure two more houses in Noble county. Serenity House is designed to provide people struggling with addiction a structured living environment that promotes recovery.

My residence and past employment with Serenity
House is a huge reason that I am alive today. Before living
there, I was heading down a very dark path filled with drugs,
alcohol, and very bad decisions. Becoming willing to accept
help was one of the largest obstacles in my way, but once I
finally had enough pain and misery I reached out to Serenity
House for help. I was in trouble with the law at the time and
saw no other options other than going to prison or dying from
my addiction. I moved into house one in Auburn in March
2013.

While residing at the Serenity House I had to completely reconstruct my life. Having been to jail several times, destroying relationships, losing every job that I had to that point, and having no driver's license I was basically starting from rock bottom. Upon entering the house I began attending 12-step meetings offered at the house, but I also went to as many outside meetings as I could. I quickly discovered that I wanted what the people at 12-step meetings had, and I'm not talking about material possessions; I wanted peace of mind and the ability to stay sober for an extended period. Along the way, I met lifelong friends and learned the tools necessary to maintain long-term sobriety. I completed the nine-month required program in December 2013 and have been sober ever since.

Around April of 2015, I applied to be a house manager at Serenity House and got the job as Auburn's house two manager. Being 25 years old and only two years sober at the time it was somewhat intimidating running a house where almost all the residents were older than I was. This opportunity was a huge reason why I chose to get into the Human Services field because I learned how rewarding helping others truly is, it is an amazing gift. Being able to watch people come in broken and slowly piece their lives back together, to see hope turn into confidence, and to be able to be a part of these men's journey to rehabilitation was truly an amazing thing to be a part of. Although I no longer work there, I still go out to these facilities

regularly to give back to the residents and try to give back a piece of the priceless gift that this place helped me find.

I would recommend this organization to anyone seeking help for addiction. The staff is completely made up of recovering people and they are all there because they want to help the next suffering person. This structured environment, just like any other recovery facility, only works if the person seeking help is willing to put in the work necessary to help themselves. Like I said before, without Serenity House there is no telling where I would be, and I believe that without having gone through this program there is a good chance that I would probably be dead or in prison. Therefore, for anyone that might need help from a facility with over 25 years of experience in the rehabilitation of recovering people, Serenity House would be a great place to start that journey.

I think both ecologies of socialization and family are represented with the work this organization does. Dealing with some of the issues such as addiction not only affects society as a whole but the family dynamic as well. Addiction is something no one wants to watch a loved one go through. Since addiction causes harm to loved ones and the larger community, agencies such as Serenity House are important for the reconciliation of all people, not just the person experiencing addiction. Restoring people to be responsible and productive members of society, as well as providing healing for members

of their families, are of utmost importance to the people running Serenity House.

In conclusion, I would just like to say that without agencies such as this being available many more people would be incarcerated or dead, and a push for more options for rehabilitation and restoration is a need in our society. With the current opioid epidemic and the number of people losing their battle to addiction, more help is needed. Serenity House might not be a perfect fit for everyone struggling with addiction and the 12-steps don't have a monopoly on recovery, but they continue to work in my life, and I am very grateful that this agency was there when I so desperately needed it. I only hope that I can repay my gratitude to them and be a positive influence for many more years to come.

-Spencer Stafford

Jon's Story

I am Jon and I am a grateful recovering addict, and this is my story.

Life before the serenity house was like what you hear in many other stories of addiction. I lived to use and used to live. My life revolved around the getting and using and finding ways to get more. Sound familiar? It is the typical story of addiction, a life controlled by drugs. Everything in life was second to the drugs, including my wife and children. I had been raised with morals and never had the desire to be a criminal, but addiction is cunning and baffling, and it took me to that life. I had my first criminal charge by the age of 15. My last at the age of 35. Twenty years of insanity.

My first trip to the serenity house was merely trying to outrun the consequences of my addiction. This was in 2009. I was a repeat offender, and the Serenity house was a way to escape incarceration. I completed the program by the time I reached sentencing and with the support of serenity house staff my charges were dismissed. Shortly thereafter I had easily convinced myself that I could control my use of alcohol. I just needed to not use drugs. I quickly discovered that alcohol was a drug, and I was a blackout drunk. Like a textbook alcoholic, I took a drink, and the drink took me. I had heard from the house managers that the disease of addiction was only getting

stronger and progressing even as I remained abstinent. Of course, I did not believe this at the time.

It was not long before I found myself using my drug of choice and my disease quickly took over again. But this time was different. Through my use I found myself obsessing on the voices of those in recovery and the staff of Serenity house. The message played repeatedly in my head while I tried to drown it out with more drugs. Drugs used to work to numb my feelings, but that no longer worked. The guilt and shame became too much to bear, but I was unable to stop on my own accord. I began to hate myself and was unable to look in the mirror once again.

The inevitable came when my home was raided by the drug task force after a lengthy investigation and I found myself facing incarceration once again. But even worse than that, my children were taken and put into the care of Dekalb County DCBS. I was found to be an unfit father by the courts and my wife was facing charges as well. This was the turning point for our family and for me. I knew from experience that I could go to the serenity house and escape the threat of jail time. But that was not enough this time. I wanted something different. I wanted to know what made me continue to use drugs even though I hated myself when I was using them. I remembered the success stories of the people who had gone through the house. Those who had not went back to the life after leaving the house. I began to put the work in to change my life. Not to

escape the charge but to instill real change. The fear of living in my own self-induced prison became greater than the fear of incarceration. The fear of losing my children forever was greater than my fear of change.

This acceptance allowed me to own my part. It allowed me to use the tools given to me at the serenity house to make the necessary changes within myself. With this new attitude and the support of the serenity house I was able to focus on what was necessary. I dealt with childhood traumas, problems of self-acceptance, self-worth, and altered my reactions to the stresses of life. I began to learn how to communicate with others. I learned how to be a father and a husband. I learned the meaning of surrender. I learned the nature of my disease.

My problem was me. My time at the Serenity House allowed me to work on myself. It allowed me to repair relationships that were broken. It gave me the tools to live. These tools were the use of the Twelve Steps and sponsorship. I was able to see that carrying resentments had clouded my judgement. Including the hatred of myself. The house taught me structure and love. The meetings taught me about the nature of the disease and how to treat it.

Through working on myself I was able to regain custody of my children and rebuild the relationship with my wife. You see, she is also an addict. We share a clean date. We share the struggle of getting clean and staying clean. We

share four beautiful children, and we share a life that we never thought possible. My wife was unable to be a resident at the serenity house because of the conflict of my being in the men's house. However she used the tools, meetings, and staff as if any other female resident would. She lived in another facility but visited the serenity house almost daily for 356 days.

The courts seen fit to return our children after many changes were implemented in our lives. Today my children are happy and healthy young adults. My wife has completed 3 college degrees and is currently working on her Doctorate of Counseling Education and Supervision. She spent 4 years as the director of a Kentucky state drug court program, working alongside a chief circuit judge and prosecutor, to guide defendants into treatment instead of incarceration. Today she is a licensed mental health therapist and provides clinical services to children that have been removed from their parents care due to all types of abuse. I am currently a licensed tattoo artist. I also spend my evenings providing self-help meeting access to those in early recovery. I support my local recovery community by holding service positions and sharing my story, whenever asked, and I sponsor several men and guide them through the journey of the 12 steps.

Because of my stay at the Serenity house I now have a life that I never imagined possible. Because of my introduction to the twelve steps I know that recovering addicts are the ultimate weapon against the disease of addiction. Together we

can and do recover. With one hand in the old timer's hand and one in the newcomer's hand we no longer have a hand to pick up dope.

Thanks for letting me share.

-Jon Falter

Sarah's Story

My name is Sarah T., and I am an alcoholic and drug addict that has not found it necessary to pick up a drink or drug by the grace of God since 7-24-2016.

I have struggled with substance abuse most of my life. I started drinking at the age of fourteen and using harder drugs (i.e. cocaine, opiates, and methamphetamines) by the age of twenty. Suffering the loss of my father at a young age set the ball rolling for a life of trying to make it all look fine on the outside, while on the inside I was dying, and alcohol and drugs seemed to make it all ok...until it didn't.

Over the years my family and friends have done full blown interventions to get me to recover. I have also tried inpatient, outpatient, and made geographical changes; you name it, I have tried it. At times I would get a little sobriety and life would start to get better, and then inevitable I was right back at the drinking and drug abuse. Decades of this vicious cycle finally took its toll on me physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I was broken and empty.

Surprisingly, it would be right in my hometown, just a few blocks from my home that I would finally find *hope*. It was time to stand still and face myself and my disease; I needed to make a change. As much as my family loved me and tried to offer me solutions, I had to pull away and do this for myself.

Nothing worth having comes easy! I called the Serenity House Inc. and within a few days, I was accepted and moved in.

One of the hardest things I have ever had to do was decide I was worth fighting for. The Serenity House provided an environment that held me accountable and reintroduced the discipline and structure that I so desperately needed, in a capacity that I could handle one day at a time. I was a hot mess when I moved into the women's Serenity House to say the least. They loved me until I could love myself and helped me learn how to be a happy, functional person again. I will never forget the afternoon I moved into the house. Jess, the manager, was finishing up with my paperwork and getting me settled in and right before she let me go she said, "There is someone that has been waiting a long time to meet you." She then pointed behind me and when I turned around there was a full length mirror, and there I was.

-Sarah T.

Chase's Story

I grew up in a loving household where all my needs were taken care of. Neither of my parents showed signs of addiction or alcoholism, yet addiction and mental illness run rampant in both of my parent's families; I appear to have both, lucky me. Growing up no one would say I was any different than other kids, and most people enjoyed my quiet and polite temperament as I child. Unbeknownst to everyone around me, I constantly felt social anxiety whenever I was out in public. I had a hard time feeling comfortable around people and this shyness continued into my teenage and adult years. That was until I found my cure on the weekends. I started smoking marijuana and drinking every weekend around the age of sixteen. I would occasionally trip on psychedelic mushrooms, but I did not experiment with harder drugs until my first year of college. I started trying ecstasy and various pills here and there, but I soon found that my drug of choice was cocaine. Cocaine made me feel excited, overly confident, and gave me the ability to outdrink everyone around me; I became the opposite of shy, I was the life of the party.

It did not take too long to realize that I had a problem. This problem, so I thought, was not one that I could not control on my own. I tried and failed for years to control my use of alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine. I tried various means to get help such as from a psychologist, self-help, working out, etc. but nothing was able to help me stay clean and sober. Eventually, I tried outpatient and inpatient rehabilitation programs. After I failed all these programs, a counselor at the hospital told me the only option left for me was to move into a halfway house. I scoffed at this idea. A halfway house was a place for someone with serious issues, it was not for someone like me. How deep my inability was to truly see my condition and my denial was killing me. After having nowhere else to go and nothing else to try, I succumbed to moving into the men's Serenity House in Auburn.

At the age of twenty I was a resident at a halfway house and was attending 12-step meetings; this is not exactly what I foresaw on career day in 5th grade. The 12-step program "suggests" that each person seek a higher power of their own understanding which was a foreign idea to me. I was never

taught to rely on or to know a higher power. I was not eager to become a Christian due to the examples of Christians that I encountered from a young age, but I had to try something new. Instead of seeking the Abrahamic God, I ended up diving into eastern religion and philosophy.

I had traveled to the lowest place of my life, and I had become willing to ask a "God" for help. I wasn't expecting anything to really happen, but I was hoping against hope that just maybe there was something "out there" that could help me. I remember coming out of a time of prayer and meditation at the halfway house and feeling that the void in my soul which I knew all too well had been filled with something; I felt at peace, and I wanted to sit in that for as long as I could. I believe this was my first experience of intimacy and experience with God. A God, which is portrayed in the story of the prodigal son, had welcomed me home. What I had been trying to find through drugs and alcohol was always with me, it was never outside of me.

This experience prompted the thought that I would love to teach others about God. I had been given this gift, the gift I

had always needed, and I could not help but want to give it to others. I sadly realized that I was not going to become a Christian, so how could I become a pastor? I could become a monk, but I did not think I was cut out for that commitment. Therefore, I rejected the idea that I would be able to have a vocation where I could show people the spiritual love and power I has found. I started recovery in 2010 and throughout the years I have conversed with God, and I have expressed a willingness to become whatever God wanted me to be; even if that was becoming a Christian (although I hoped that was not part of the plan. I really hated Christianity). But, if God wanted me to be a Christian and that is where he thought I could be of most service, then I wanted that. My life was no longer my own, and who am I to tell God how I will use the gift I received?

One day I was driving past a Methodist church in

Auburn and felt magnetized to go into the church. I had never
felt this way before towards a church and I decided to listen to
that inclination. I went that Sunday and heard a message I did
not think Christians could preach; they spoke of inclusivity,

unconditional love, and acceptance for all. I fell in love with the church and the pastors there. My pastors encouraged me to follow that halfway house experience where I felt called to work for God and to consider ministry. That was November 2017 and as of this writing I am halfway done with my seminary degree.

When you're addicted to drugs it's hard to want to be alive. I did not think my life had any purpose or value. The only time I was excited about my life was when I knew I was going to be able to get my next high. The times in between highs were when I would contemplate taking my own life. I never knew what I wanted to be growing up. Everyone around me wanted to be engineers, doctors, lawyers, nurses- I just wanted to party. I never felt a calling to anything until I got sober and found God. Once in recovery my life got better, but I am not only referring to having money or healthy relationshipssomething within me had changed dramatically. I had a will to live and a desire to grow with God as I understood him. I worked a corporate job for the three years prior to coming to Duke Divinity School and I was making more money than I

ever had. I thought that I would somehow be content with a regular 8-5pm doing inside sales. But I never got excited about the next workday. I was only working to make money, to live as comfortable of a life as possible. So my life seemed void of any true purpose. I did not feel as though I was really living as fully as God would have me.

It was not until I started seminary that I actually got excited to be alive, excited to wake up and see what God was going to do, what I was going to learn, who I was going to meet, how I was going to be challenged, etc. I really did not know that my life could be this good and I am astonished at how my life has drastically changed. There are many people and experiences that have shaped who I am today, and undoubtedly Serenity House provided a foundation for these occurrences to happen. If you are a resident at Serenity, I encourage you to put every ounce of effort you can into doing what is asked of you there. You have nothing to lose, and everything to gain. You may just end up finding the very best of life, just like many of us alumni have. Peace.

Scarlets Story

My story isn't so different than everyone else's. Some of the details separate us and that's about it. I know what it's like to feel like I'm wrapped in a web and can't break free. To experience pain and hopelessness so deep that I no longer wanted to live. To not want to accept that I had a problem and that somehow of my own will, I will pull it together. I would try. And try again.

My life was good as a child. Things were far from perfect, but they weren't so bad either. By the time I hit my teens, I was rebellious and making poor choices which led to me being sent away over and over. I blamed my mother for abandonment and my step-father's lack of love. I would spend many years trying to fill that void with many different substances and bad relationships.

When I had something good, I didn't know how to keep it because I didn't know how to be happy or content, so I ran, which was what I always did and the only thing I knew how to do. I began using meth and things I was involved in because of the lifestyle landed me behind bars over and over. Eventually I added heroin to the mix, and nothing got better.

I finally got so sick and tired of the cycle I was in. I knew I needed help and I was scared of the thought of living a life free from drugs, but something had to change- I was raising

the white flag. I wanted to be free of those substances and I didn't get it the first time because I wasn't ready to do everything that was suggested to me. I am one of the fortunate ones to make it back.

The Serenity House is very near and dear to my heart because my life began to transform during my residency's years clean and sober. I finally listened and did that which was suggested because I was so afraid to fall back into that old life and nothing I had ever tried worked. Today I try to pay it forward and keep what I have by helping others and sharing my story. I am living proof that you can be freed from the bondage of addiction!

-Scarlett Murray

Scott's Story

I had a warrant out for my arrest at the time of my dad's passing. I decided I would turn myself in after my dad's funeral. Well, the night before I turned myself in I was staying in a hotel with my brother and sister-in-law in Wabash. They wanted to help me turn my life around and began talking to me about the prospect of living at a halfway house. They researched and found the Serenity House in Auburn, IN and got the application for me. I had been off heroin for one day at this point and I was withdrawing badly. So I look at all this paperwork and kind of put my head down and think oh s***!! As daunting as it all looked and as crappy as I felt I really didn't want to complete the application, but something in me told me just to do it. It took me roughly two hours to complete everything because I wanted to be as truthful as possible. The withdrawals sucked and I still remember to this day how I felt. From that point on it was in my sister's hands to get it mailed to the house manager in Auburn. I knew that just because I applied to the house did not mean that I would be accepted into it.

A couple of months of my prison bit passed by and my sister told me I have a bed waiting for me at Serenity House once I'm released. I was relieved and scared to death at the same time. I mean I was leaving my hometown where all my "friends" were, and my family resided to this place I've never been. My release date was May 5th, and I was a resident at

Serenity House on May 6th. I remember coming into Auburn and my sister and I cruised the town to see what it was like. I liked it and I felt I was ready to start a new life at the house. Upon arriving, I remember getting really nervous. I kept telling myself this was my legacy to my dad and that I was capable of doing it.

As I'm walking up to the house I see guys smoking out on the porch and I tell them my name and that I'm moving in. When I first walked into the house there was a tall guy sitting at the table reading a book. Little did I know that he, Matt Creager, would be one of my good friends from there on. He began showing me the ropes in the house and telling me where I'd be staying. I was pretty excited to be there at that point and in the end I realized how amazing this opportunity was. I learned how to socialize, be accountable, work hard, and love myself. These are emotions and behaviors that I had not experienced in nearly twenty years. It was really quite amazing how everything was unfolding.

Within a couple of months of living at Serenity House, I was talking to my kids that I had not talked to for years. Old family members that previously would not have anything to do with me were reaching out to me, asking me if I'd like to hang out or talk. I was succeeding at this thing called life!

Something else I did while at Serenity House was get in shape. I literally got in the best shape of my life and I could not believe the progress I had made. I had found love for myself

and cared about my well-being. This type of self-love and care were foreign feelings for me, and I learned to love it.

Serenity House gave me so many opportunities. I was able to go to AA conventions and meet so many new people, it was amazing. Not to mention the people I met and that I still have some contact with today. The Serenity House truly taught me how to live life sober and gave me a newfound brotherhood. This is a group of men, residents, and non-residents, that would do anything to protect me and have my best interest at heart.

Unfortunately, things did not end the best at the Serenity House for me. I ended up leaving earlier than planned and soon thereafter relapsing. I continued to use for nearly 2 years after leaving. In March of 2020 I again started seeking help. Most of the time those people I reached out to had a relationship with Serenity House, and I have been sober since. I owe my sobriety and life to the support that I gained while I was at the Serenity House. I was able to meet some guys that I could always call on if I needed help. I'm very grateful to have those men in my life.

Serenity House was the best decision I ever made in my life. I will forever be in debt to the organization and people I met there.

For Further Information:

Serenity House, Inc provides transitional living (recovery homes) for those men and women who have made the vital decision to become free from the bondage of alcohol and/or drugs.

Our highly structured environment and our programs are designed to facilitate a spiritual transformation that will enable our residents to lead a happy, useful, and productive life, free from alcohol or drugs.

If you honestly feel you have a problem with alcohol or drugs; if you are willing to actively participate in your recovery; and, if you are open minded about the nature of the help offered, we can help you help yourself.

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Herein lies six stories of men and women who once lived at Serenity House of Auburn, Indiana. The contributors share their story of recovery in hopes that somehow it will impact your own. Thank you for trudging with us this "happy road to destiny."



Chase Rollins has been a resident at Serenity House on four different occasions. He will be completing seminary in spring of '22 and intends on becoming a hospital chaplain.

